



UNITED STATES COMMISSION
FOR THE PRESERVATION OF AMERICA'S HERITAGE ABROAD

WARREN L. MILLER
CHAIRMAN

March 6, 2003

His Excellency Peter Medgyessy
Prime Minister of the Republic
of Hungary
Budapest, Hungary

By Telefax

My dear Mr. Prime Minister,

The Associated Press has reported that unknown persons defiled graves at a Jewish cemetery in Szigetvar, Hungary. According to the report, tombs were broken into, a wooden crucifix was burned, the Jewish star was painted on graves, and headstones were overturned. The report quoted a spokeswoman for the local police as saying that the incident was being investigated.

One of the primary responsibilities of the Commission of the Government of the United States of America that I chair is to seek assurances from foreign governments that cemeteries and other cultural properties that are associated with the heritage of U.S. citizens will be protected and preserved. A significant number of people of Hungarian and Jewish heritage live in the United States. Thus, the Commission has serious concerns about the hate crime that occurred at Szigetvar.

This concern is particularly acute because (1) the preservation of burial places is a tenet of the Jewish religion and (2) the sacrilegious acts recall the anti-Semitism that led to the murder of more than 500,000 Hungarian Jews during the Holocaust.

Accordingly, I respectfully request that you ensure that the investigation of the desecration of the cemetery is thorough and that the perpetrators are prosecuted to the full extent of the law if they are identified. I also respectfully encourage your government to speak out against attacks on the property of and threats to cultural minorities such as those which occurred at Szigetvar.

On behalf of the Government of the United States, I have proposed that your government joins ours in a formal commitment to the protection and preservation of cemeteries and other cultural properties, especially those that are endangered because of genocide and persecution of minorities in the past. This proposal was presented to the Government of Hungary several years ago and again presented to Ambassador Simonyi a few months ago. We look forward to working with your government to conclude such an agreement.

Please accept my appreciation in advance for your attention to this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Warren L. Miller". The script is cursive and fluid.

Warren L. Miller

Cc: Ambassador Andras Simonyi
Ambassador Nancy G. Brinker
Ms. Heather A. Conley,
Deputy Assistant Secretary of State